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ABSTRACT

The writing of ESL students, while sophisticated in some respects, often contains fragments and run-ons. Because these students have no reliable, self-monitoring system for analyzing their writing and because they believe they are communicating effectively, they fail to recognize their difficulties in forming complete sentences. This paper discusses a program implemented in an advanced intermediate ESL college composition class. The program proposes that students will be able to monitor their writing for incorrectly formed sentences if given a series of exercises designed to help them analyze their work. The key concept is GLUE, a term used for all connectors, including coordinating and subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns. Using a reference list of the GLUE words in English, students first label those they have used and, then, identify the finite clauses or subject-verb (SV) units. The number of GLUE words and SVs used are counted up as the student determines the type of sentence unit s/he has created. A complete sentence requires one more SV than GLUE. In altering their work, students learn to remove an SV, add a GLUE, or in some other way make the sentence conform to the rule for a complete sentence. (Author/JK)

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GLUE: A Useful Concept for Eliminating Fragments and Run-Ons

Helaine W. Marshall

The writing of even advanced students of English as a Second Language contains fragments and run-ons , often their most frustrating sentence level problem. While their written work may be quite sophisticated in other respects, their writing suffers from a failure to focus on the formation of complete sentences. Because these students believe that they are communicating effectively and because they have no reliable, self-monitoring system for analyzing their writing, they do not direct their attention and energy to the elimination of fragments and run-ons in their work.

The approach taken here is that students will be able to monitor their own writing for incorrectly formed sentences if given a series of exercises designed to help them analyze their work. The key concept is GLUE, a term used for all clause connectors. GLUE includes both coordinating and subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns. That is to say, any element that can introduce a finite clause, whether that clause is a main clause or some type of subordinate clause, such as an adverbial, noun, or relative clause. Using a reference list of the GLUE words in English, students label those they have used. They then identify the finite clauses or SVs (Subject-Verb units). Finally, they count the number of GLUE words and SVs to determine what type of sentence unit they have created. For example,

1G + 1SV = F (Fragment), as in: When you came back.
G S V

Similarly,

1G + 3SV = RO (Run-On), as in: I met you when you got back
S V G S V
we were happy.
S V

A complete sentence requires one more SV than GLUE. Observe:

1G + 2SV = CS (Complete Sentence), as in: I met you when you
S V G S
got back.
V

In altering their work, students learn to remove an SV, add a GLUE, or in some other way make the sentence conform to the rule for a complete sentence.

The techniques presented in this paper were implemented in a college composition course for advanced intermediate ESL students. The students received one month of intensive work on forming complete sentences, which included three class hours and one assigned composition, a first draft and a revised version, per week. Effectiveness of the instruction was assessed informally by comparing two in-class compositions, one written before and one after the special instruction. The results for this pilot group are reported here as evidence of some improvement but are not to be interpreted as statistical evidence since the experiment was not designed for systematic analysis. The average number of fragments and run-ons per 250 words (the average composition length) was 2.23 for the first set of compositions and .85 for the second. Stated differently, the students produced a fragment or run-on for every 112 words in their first compositions and for every 293 words in their second. Thus, there was a noticeable decrease in fragments and run-ons for the group as a whole.

The teaching strategy used with this class addressed both the affective and the cognitive aspects of the problem. Each will be discussed in detail.

The instructor's starting point must be an understanding and acceptance of the student's current way of thinking about language. Compare, for example, the following:

(1) a. The woman is alone however she doesn't look unhappy because she has a smile on her face.

b. The woman is alone, but she doesn't look unhappy because she has a smile on her face.

To the student who produced 1a in a sentence combining exercise, the rule allowing but to conjoin clauses and barring however from that function, seems arbitrary and not worth mastering. As Jain (1974:197) points out, "as part of a reduction strategy aimed at learning economy, he [the second language learner] by and large ignores sub-classes and subsumes them in highly generalized rules." For the purpose of communication, however succeeds, and so the

student sees no reason to restrict its use. The difference between however and but is not a salient one for this student. The student sees as very frustrating the fact that but and however fall into different grammatical categories and that their respective functions must be mastered separately. The student tends to believe that the instructor sees only logic and order in this apparently illogical and arbitrary sub-classification of lexical items. The instructor must show an awareness of the arbitrariness of language and an acceptance of the student's dislike for it. It might be useful to point out the arbitrary nature of certain aspects of the student's own language.

The student's primary focus is nearly always meaning, not form. Observe this incomplete sentence produced when the rule requiring one independent clause per sentence was ignored:

(2) In Tel-Aviv, which is the city that I like the most because I know the city from inside and outside with its suburbs.

It would seem that a student with the ability to subordinate in such a sophisticated manner would also be able to differentiate between a main and subordinate clause and be sure to include one main clause in each sentence. This student's problem is not one of ability but one of focus. The student sees meaning as paramount since it is essential to successful communication. Form is important only to the extent that it contributes to meaning. The student's strategy of reducing the load of rules to those that appear to be most valuable for communicative purposes is a good language learning strategy. The instructor must acknowledge that the strategy works and that, despite the fragments and run-ons, the student is getting the point across. In other words, to "bill" the formation of complete sentences as essential to being understood will not produce good results. Instead the instructor should explain that the conventions of written English require complete sentences regardless of the clarity of meaning obtained without them. The instructor must shift the students' focus--at some point and to some extent--to form if any rules for complete sentences are to sink in.

A convincing argument can be made that by paying attention to form the student-writer is insuring that the reader's attention will focus on meaning since the jarring effect of the fragments and run-ons will not be diverting the reader from the writer's intent.

Yet another issue for the student is the constant emphasis on correction. In helping the student to become an effective writer, the instructor should emphasize analysis not correction. That is to say, rather than asking the student to find errors, ask the student to identify the various elements used in a given sentence. The student is less likely to become involved in the writing process if editing and revising focus primarily on correction. By focusing on analysis, the teacher helps the student to re-read the written work in a non-threatening manner. The correction process follows this and is simply the natural result of finding the fragments and run-ons. With the emphasis on "what I did" rather than "what I did wrong", the student is less resistant to the teacher's guidance and instruction and progress is more likely.

The affective domain plays a major role in the process of learning new material. If the student's feelings and attitudes are accepted by the instructor, then the student will be receptive to suggestions for change. In teaching writing, the instructor must first understand why the rules for complete sentences are being ignored and only then will he be able to demonstrate convincingly to the students why the rules should not be ignored.

We turn now to the lessons themselves and to the techniques used to focus the students' attention on the rules for complete sentences. The first step is an exercise such as the one below, taken from Raimes, Focus on Composition (1978:8)

(3) Write S next to all complete and correctly punctuated sentences in the examples that follow. Write F or R next to fragments or run-ons. Rewrite any fragments or run-ons as complete, separated sentences.

a. Carpentry is useful.
b. Is fun, too.
c. You get a very satisfied feeling.
d. When you work with wood and make something.
e. You need a few basic tools, they are not very expensive.
f. A hammer, a saw, a measuring tape, a square, nails, screws, and glue.
g. An electric drill is useful, but you can manage without it.
h. An electric saw is useful you can manage without it.
i. Patience is something that a good carpenter must have.
j. Because it is essential to measure and cut accurately.
k. If you don't, your piece of furniture might be crooked.
l. Like my first piece was.

I first asked the students to identify the sentences, fragments, and run-ons. Many were able to do this; some were not. However, when I asked them to explain why they had classfied each example as they had, their answers were vague and inadequate. "It's too long," was given to account for a run-on, and "it's not a complete thought," for a fragment. They were relying on an intuitive feel for a complete sentence,but they had no rules, no systematic way of analyzing an example and classifying it.

There was one exception: Each sentence must have a subject and a verb. The class agreed on this rule and was able to identify subjects and verbs accurately. Thus, they knew how to show that

3 b. Is fun, too.

and

3f. A hammer, a saw, a measuring tape, a square, nails, screws, and glue.

were fragments.

They were missing a key concept that would enable them to explain the remaining examples. That concept, I labelled GLUE (suggested to me by its use in example 3f) We looked at example 3d again:

When you work with wood and make something.

I told them there were two ways to fix the fragment: add or subtract. They were then able to suggest the following:

(4) a. You work with wood and make something.

OR

b. You get a very satisfied feeling when you work with wood and make something.

While the second solution was the intended answer for the exercise, I felt that the GLUE concept would be clearer if both solutions were included. I explained that the word removed to produce 4a was one of many English words that perform a function called GLUE. These words join two things, in grammatical terms, two SVs or Subject-Verb units. (This term was used instead of clause since it contain a reference two familiar concepts, subjects and verbs.) Since 3d had only one SV, there was no need for the GLUE. By adding 3c to 3d however, a second SV was brought into the sentence,and the GLUE was needed.

A series of questions and answers led to their explaining the other examples. In example 3e,

You need a few basic tools, they are not very expensive.

they saw two SVs and, although they had no list of the GLUE words at that time, they saw no word that seemed to them to be functioning as GLUE. Since GLUE is needed when two SVs are present, they suggested adding <u>and</u>, which I told them was another GLUE word. Next, they showed how example 3g,

An electric drill is useful but you can manage without it.

is a complete sentence with two SVs and GLUE. In analyzing example 3k,

If you don't, your piece of furniture might be crooked.

they learned that the GLUE can be in initial position and that a comma indicates the boundary between the two SVs it joins. Looked at in this way, the rule for comma placment becomes much easier to internalize. The remaining examples were discussed in a similar manner.

Following this first exercise, the students received a list of the GLUE words in English and were given the task of labelling S,V, and G (GLUE) on their compositions to prove that each sentence was a complete one. If they used two SVs, they needed to have GLUE, and if they used GLUE, they needed to have two SVs.

As they worked on their compositions and on sentence combining exercises, longer sentences came up, and we expanded the rules to accomodate them. On student produced 1a (discussed above):

> The woman is alone however she doesn't look unhappy because she has a smile on her face.

We discussed the fact that <u>because</u>, although GLUE, could not join all three SVs, but rather only two of them. Since <u>however</u> was not GLUE, a second GLUE was needed for the sentence to be correctly formed. The result was 1b:

> The woman is alone but she doesn't look unhappy because there
> S_1 V_1 G S_2 V_2 G S_3
>
> is a smile on her face.
> V_3

The notations under the sentence show how the students labelled their work, indicating each SV by number. By counting the number of SVs and the number of Gs in each correct sentence, each fragment, and each run-on, the students devised the three basic rules for sentences given above. With these rules the students were able to find and correct many of their fragments and run-ons.

In advanced lessons of the unit, students learned to examine more complex combinations of S,V, and G. For example, they discovered the possibility of "hidden GLUE"--deletable relative pronouns-- as in:

> The child I saw in the corner was sleeping.
> S_1 S_2 V_2 V_1

They also learned to work with "combined GLUE"--subject position relative pronouns--as in:

> The child who was sleeping in the corner looked content.
> S_1 G/S_2 V_2 V_1

The GLUE list became subdivided, and new rules were added to the basic three.

When the students appeared to have mastered these basic rules, I introduced a more advanced version of the GLUE concept that differentiated among various types of GLUE. The additional distinctions enabled them to explain certain of their sentences which had previously eluded them. There were three sets of characteristics used to describe GLUE:

(1) joiner GLUE and included GLUE;
(2) combined GLUE and simple GLUE; and
(3) hidden GLUE and showing GLUE.

Each type is explained below. (See Appendix A for a reference chart.)

The first distinction is between coordinators (and, but, or) on the one hand and subordinators (when, because, etc.) and relative pronouns (who, which, etc.) on the other. The joiner GLUE is independent of the clause and does not move from its position between the two SVs. The included GLUE, however, as the term suggests is part of the SV it introduces and moves with it to various positions in relation to the other SV it joins. Observe:

(5) a. When I saw you, you looked happy.
G S_1 V_1 S_2 V_2

b. The child of whom you spoke is over there.
S_1 G S_2 V_2 V_1

Subordinating conjunctions may appear in initial position, and relative pronouns may interrupt an SV in order to appear alongside their antecedents.

On the other hand, joiners do show a certain flexibility in that the subject of the second SV can be deleted if it is identical to that of the first SV and if a joiner is used between the two SVs. Deleting the subject produces a more condensed version of the sentence yielding a compound predicate (1S + 2V) rather than a compound sentence (1SV + 1SV), as in:

(6) a. I saw them and I heard them.
b. I saw them and heard them.

No such deletion is possible for included GLUE:

(7) a. I saw them after I heard them.
b. *I saw them after heard them.

The second distinction is designed to account for the dual function of relative pronouns, and for wh-words introducing noun clauses, as in:

(8) a. The officer who worked so hard on the plan is tired now.
S_1 G/S_2 V_2 V_1

b. They told me who was going to be there.
S_1 V_1 G/S_2 V_2

The students were puzzled by these forms until we discussed the sentence elements GLUE and subject, as separate in many languages but often combined in English. Compare 8a with:

(9) *The officer that he worked so hard on the plan is tired now.

In 9, that is GLUE and he is subject #2. This analysis also proved useful in explaining the combination of GLUE and other sentence elements, such as the direct object, as in:

(10) a. The books which we read were fascinating.
b. I read whatever I find enjoyable.

The concept of combined GLUE enabled them to understand the nature of relative clauses and wh- noun clauses.

The last distinction was needed to account for correct sentences in which no GLUE appeared despite the presence of two SVs. Observe:

(11) a. I know that he will be there.
S_1 V_1 G S_2 V_2

b. I know he will be there.
S_1 V_1 S_2 V_2

(12) a. The child that I saw in the corner was sleeping.
S_1 G S_2 V_2 V_1

b. The child I saw in the corner was sleeping.
S_1 S_2 V_2 V_1

In 11b and 12b the GLUE is hidden. If the clause connector is a relative pronoun functioning as the object in its clause or a that- noun clause introducer for which the noun clause is itself an object, then GLUE deletion is common in English.

The students were asked to test for hidden GLUE by trying to add that, which, or whom, to their sentences. Also, they learned how to analyze such examples as:

(13) a. The person that saw me was smiling.

b. *The person saw me was smiling.
S_1 V_2 V_1

They readily saw that there was no subject #2 and, in 13b, that the GLUE could not hide in this sentence.

The discussion of hidden GLUE led to work on condensing strategies, such as using non-finite -ing clauses and prepositional phrases to replace relative clauses. For example:

(14) a. The child who is sitting in the corner...

b. The child sitting in the corner...

c. The child in the corner...

The students saw a system emerging, a way of analyzing English and coming to an understanding of its conventions of form.

The original intention was to eliminate fragments and run-ons but the concept of GLUE affected many aspects of the students' written language. The labelling of S, V, and G showed them the sentence patterns they used most often, and by reading other students' papers, they began to expand their repertoire of patterns. The writing that resulted from the intensive work on fragments and run-ons showed not only more complete sentences, but also more variety and sophistocation than their earlier work. Furthermore, they began to see how they could control their use of the language. They learned how to "do things with English," to step back from their written work and revise and edit successfully.

The value of such a system of analysis is that the students have a focus in re-reading what they have written. They are labelling and examining what they have done. The students become active and interested in identifying the GLUE and SVs, and often find themselves more involved in the entire writing process.

Students who have worked with this system have reacted very positively, and feedback has indicated that the success of the approach is the result of the following factors:

a. teacher acknowledgement and acceptance of student attitudes (i.e. "I'm already getting my point across; I don't like bothering with these rules")

b. emphasis on analysis not correction (i.e. not"What I did wrong" but "What I did")

c. gimmick of GLUE as unifying concept for the system (i.e. a nonlinguistic term; a simplified focus)

d. reliable system of rules and word lists (not available in most ESL materials)

e. extensive use of students' own written work (personal involvement in sentences for analysis)

Details on the exercises given and on the advanced rules for GLUE can be provided to interested colleagues. Write to: Helaine W. Marshall, ESL Coordinator, Baruch College, CUNY, 17 Lexington Ave. N.Y. N.Y. 10010.

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APPENDIX A GLUE REFERENCE CHART

A. JOINER GLUE (traditionally--coordinating conjunctions) *

and
but
or

Note: Never hidden or combined

B. INCLUDED GLUE (traditionally--subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns)

Group I -- Never hidden or combined (subordinating conjunctions)

after
although
as
because
however
if
in case
in order that
in that
insofar
since
so
though
till
unless
when
whenever
where
whether...or not
whichever
while

(list not intended to be exhaustive)

GROUP II -- Combined, never hidden (Subject relative pronouns)

who
which--(used as subject in an SV)
that--(used as subject in an SV)

GROUP III -- Hidden, never combined (Object relative pronouns)

whom
which--(used as object in an SV)
that--(used as object in an SV)

Note: Hidden Glue is always optional. Glue may also be showing.

*Notes in parenthesis do not appear on student copy of chart.

APPENDIX B SAMPLE STUDENT COMPOSITION

(GLUE, S, and V are labelled)

After the telephone
G S_1

rung many times, Sam Spade answered it slowly. He was sleeping soundly
V_1 S_2 V_2 S_1 V_1

because he had came back to his apartment very late and had slept for
G S_2 V_{2-a} V_{2-b}

one hour. He worked hard, so he was very tired. When he heard his boss's
S_1 V_1 G S_2 V_2

voice, he worked up completely. Talking with him, Sam Spade turned on the
S_1 V_1

light. He looked around his untidy room which was dispersed by his clothes.
S_1 V_1 G,S_2 V_2

After he hung up the telephone, he walked to the window which was opened by
G S_1 V_1 G,S_3 V_3

strong wind. Closing the window, he saw outside where was very heavy rain
V_1 G,S_2 V_2

like a storm. When he came back to his bed, his arm clock said 2:05. Taking
G S_1 V_1 S_2 V_2

off his pajamas, he went into the kitchen and drank a glass of water. He picked
S_1 V_{1-a} V_{1-b} S_1 V_{1-a}

up his clothes on the floor and got dressed. After he fastened his shoes,
V_{1-b} G S_1 V_1

he picked up the telephone to order a taxicab. While he was waiting, he
S_2 V_2 G S_1 V_1 S_2

lit his cigarette with the gold-plated lighter. After he had smoked, he put on
V_2 G S_1 V_1 S_2 V_{2-a}

his coat and stuffed his ID card and a pistol into his pockets. When the
V_{2-b} G

street door bell rang, he left for the house of murder case in a hurry. He was
S_1 V_1 S_2 V_2 S_1 V_1

an able detective.